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"THINGS THAT HAVE HELPED US UP THE  
HUMAN WAY."

III "SOME PLACE APART—PRIVACY."

A SERMON  
BY  
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“SOME PLACE APART—PRIVACY”

Being the third in a series of three sermons, on  
“THINGS THAT HAVE HELPED US UP THE  
HUMAN WAY.”

- I “SOMETHING TO DO—WORK.”
- II “SOMETHING TO THINK.”
- III “SOME PLACE APART—PRIVACY.”

## "THINGS THAT HAVE HELPED US UP THE HUMAN WAY."

### III "SOME PLACE APART—PRIVACY."

**W**E have considered working and thinking as humanizers of our race. Both we found are acquisitions through which we have been lifted from a workless and a thoughtless world. Through work we found that the bounding physical vigor of men was brought into restraint which made possible, order and a moral code. Thinking, we found, is man's only distinction, in which he must excel if he is to excel at all. For most men the habit of thinking has been acquired by trying to follow after other minds which have gone before. We noted the providence of history that gave us at the outset, in our western civilization, something difficult to try the mind on: great languages bearing philosophy, poetry, and appreciation of beautiful things, God-given and man-made. Then, came a great system of human government, the Roman, and a great system of divine government, scholastic theology. To think hard and long, if we were right, is a great humanizer, and all these things, given our western world to try its mind on, are admirable for that. Men had to think hard and long to follow after what these masters first had thought. We saw that it was not the truth of their conclusions

that mattered so much. It was not the intellectual goal but the intellectual going that was needed. A certain kind of thinking made the first thoughtful men and the first love of learning. It twice lifted the world out of barbarism and made a race of men humanized to a degree that made the advent of scientific knowledge no more disastrous than it was. We raised the obvious question: is this preparation through which the human race has gone, the process through which the single mind should still go? To-day we are thinking of the contribution of privacy, of some place apart, to the upbuilding of men.

We are dealing here with matters about which much discussion and propaganda center today. They have some bearing upon all theories of education, industry and government. We are thinking of tendencies of thought in our world, in which work, thought, and privacy are involved and discounted. This often takes for itself the name liberal and radical. We are going back to the only place we have to go, the human race up to this point, to see how these have come and what they are worth. The radical goes to the radix, the root of things. We are asking if we are discounting things that go to the roots of things and are deeply imbedded in the history of man.

We are thinking of the emancipation of man from the herd, this process of separation which has left a



man standing in a place apart. Again, as in the case of work and thought, we are tracing the progress of a human acquisition, of something won through centuries of human effort. We are thinking of this privacy won for man's body, his belongings, and his mind, won from a world that lived in community, always in company, in a crowd. The history of the acquisition of privacy of life, and all that goes with it, to secure it and to assure it, would be about the history of civilization. Increased privacy goes with increased civilization and decreased privacy, all tendencies and theories which look toward throwing the private life back into the common heap and the herd, is moving not to the better day but back to days that are gone, and ought for us to be gone forever.

We are thinking of the human pack, the human herd, the totem group, the polyandrous and the polygamous companies, living their life all together, hunting together, taking their food together, sleeping together, always moving on together, holding all they had in possession together. We are thinking of the long ages of human history when this kind of life was all they had and was all that they could get. They thought they did very well if they could hold on all together. Privacy of life and emancipation from the herd were far off in the future. If they had wanted it and had felt the need of it, they could not have had it. That was the only way to hold

on to life then, hold on in groups. The one who went out for privacy in those days would not have come back or lasted long.

After centuries and centuries, no one knows how long, as the enemies became less, and protection came, another great step could be taken safely away from the herd, the crowded way of living. One man and one woman, with their children, could get a little space between them and all others: tribesmen, clansmen, kinsmen. Life has traveled through the herd, the pack, the totem group, the polyandrous and the polygamous companies, to the little monogamic group, one man and one woman with their children. This is the long sought for, the last arrived, and, no doubt, the final unit for our human kind. A little company, what we mean by a family, stood out alone from the great crowd of human beings to take life apart. The confusion of the largest and most disorderly family is peace, quiet, and privacy itself, no doubt, compared with life before, when all of a great company of human beings lived all their life together. The separation of the family group, with privacy for all the processes of life, family property and family place, is an acquisition of ages of human struggle.

But civilization had not finished its work with privacy for the family. The emancipation of man was to go on until everyone of that family group was

emancipated and stood out with a place of his own, and a place for the things that were his. These are his personal belongings, things of convenience and use, in a place apart from all other human beings where he can be alone with his own mind. For centuries the best that could be done was a place of shelter for the whole family group, a shelter without rooms set apart for any special thing or person. They were all crowded in under one shelter and did all that they did, together. This was a human necessity for a long time, beyond a doubt. In the time of Henry VIII, we are informed, much of the life of families was in one room, shared by all the animals they owned. This habit was ingrained by centuries of necessity and still remains often where the necessity is passed. One finds parts of the country still where this old habit of the race, all living in one room for all purposes, still persists; where trees grow outside their door and men have abundant strength and time to enlarge their dwellings and get this separate and private life for everyone. With protection for life and increased production came the possibility of carrying this emancipation of each life one step further. With finer nerves, that could feel things more, and the finer feeling that was disturbed by the disorder and the confusion, this next step in the emancipation of the individual was taken. As man had been emancipated from pack, herd, and great groups of kinsmen, so, he was to be emancipated a little more, emancipated a little from the family



group itself. The one room shelter expanded into the house with the different parts for the different functions of life. The human dwelling expanded beyond a place of mere shelter for a company of bodies, and became a place for delicately responsive human minds, each separated from all the others. Here at last was a place apart, a room for each, which should hold and express what was personally and peculiarly his. His body and his mind are free and separated at last from the great herd of bodies and minds doing only what they could do, and as they could do, in a great company. This was a great triumph and the effect in turn upon the human race, of this emancipation of each one of the family, has been incalculable.

We have reason to believe that the human race did not improve very rapidly until the family and the individual were emancipated a little from the crowd. Living all together; owning all they owned together and working as a crowd for a crowd, was human nature trying to build itself up without using the strongest trait in human nature for that up-building. Historically the oldest and strongest incentive to human effort is not the right to vote, or free speech or liberty to worship God. It is not these things, held out for inducement and reward, which for most of human history have made men reach out and stretch up. These are all very recent incentives to human effort. For long ages of human history



these were not the greatest incentives, or incentives at all. For most of the human race today, even in the best countries, there is no great need of, or passion for, either the right to vote, or free speech, or liberty to worship God. These are not urgent human needs, or strong incentives to human effort even among us in this year of our Lord. Before these things were goals for men to strive for, and factors of race progress; before the need of this kind of liberty was felt, or a word coined to name the idea, the great incentive for human effort was liberty in property. In that part of the world where until this day there is no name for liberty in the language; in that part of the world where our oldest records of the first civilizations are found, there is an elaborate code for property. The oldest clay tablets tell us that this human trait was then active in the affairs of men. This acquisition of property and its place is evidenced by conveyances of chattels and land. The oldest human code of law, that of Hammurabi, is already detailed in the matter of the rights of men in property. Every title deed today has the terminology of the ancient world. Property acquired certain sacredness in their eyes. This strongest incentive to human effort, the acquisition of personal effects, personal property, in the control of a person and for the benefit of a person, that could not operate when men had to live in crowds to live at all. It could not operate for race upbuilding until some master of order made a condition of security so that

men could be assured that what they worked for would remain in their control for their benefit.

Before there was a bill of human rights there was a code of the rights of property. It might seem that private property was sacred and guarded before men were. This is said now, sometimes, that property is sacred and men are not. This is not quite discriminating enough for a careful student of history. It is so, that private property, the right to it, and the rules about it, came very early because they had to. Human liberty is by necessity connected with property, and that is the kind of liberty in which all people are interested. Only a few are interested, and only recently, in the liberty to vote, or to talk, or to worship; but, all men and the earliest men, even wild men, were interested in this liberty of property. One lives his life, eats, sleeps, is sheltered, protects himself, and does all that he does, with property of some kind. It has to be his; to be in his control where he can get at it morning, noon and night. The liberty to live at all is based always, everywhere, and at all times upon the liberty to hold property for private use and to be secure in that use.

Human effort begins just here as well as human liberty. It is the great incentive to human effort and there is no case in human history where men have done much, or made much advance, where

this strongest motive of human nature has not been allowed scope to operate. The only case where success in any degree has been had without this security of private possessions to individual persons, is where religious motives have been invoked. It is interesting to note that all today who advocate going back to crowd ownership of crowd property, deny, and discourage, the only conditions under which crowd ownership has ever been successful; that is, in community life, controlled and motivated by deep religious convictions which laid great stress upon the vanity of human affairs and the necessity of other-worldly interests to the exclusion almost entirely of interest in this. Security in private property is first, and the basis of all human liberty. The human race did not start to go until it got this security for private possessions and it has never made much gain any place without it. This is basic, fundamental. If any one thinks that he does not believe this, let him get up for a few mornings and find that some one who has a different idea has taken the contents of his pantry and ice box, and carried off his clothes. Nothing is so basic in civilization as security in private property and to be secure in the use of that property for increased privacy. Liberty cannot be conceived of without this and nothing so outrages normal human nature as taking property without right which belongs to a person. When some eccentric genius such as Bronson Alcott goes over and takes what he happens to need from



his good neighbor Emerson, that is a privilege allowed to genius which we all like to tell as we do of some brilliant escapade of a little child. But when we frame that sentiment into a rule of human conduct and undermine that security of individual persons in personal belongings, we are tampering with the very means and assurance of all human liberty, all private life and the very motive power of race upbuilding.

It has its evils. This trait of our human make-up that would acquire; that takes pleasure in personal effects; that builds up life by means of personal effects, there are evils that come from this run wild. But these evils, we doubt not, are small compared with the progress of man, with this very human trait for the motive and the power. One might say that this is a human trait and therefore we ought to crucify it. So men have said that keeping clean, and in health, marrying, and rearing children are human traits and that we ought to crucify them; but the best judgment of men now is that these human traits ought not to be crucified but to be exercised. In the same way we could say that this human trait which acquires property; secures liberty and gains privacy, basic factors of race advance, we could say in the same way that this is natural to man but that we ought to crucify it. This doctrine that marrying and rearing children is a human trait, which ought to be eliminated in the interest of the

higher life and the religious life, that was a part of the doctrine of original sin. If it had obtained the human race would have come to an end. This desire to eliminate from human affairs this human trait that acquires and lifts life by the things acquired, that may be just a part of the doctrine of original sin. Some have suggested that it is, and no doubt they are right. It would be to eliminate the most persistent and perhaps the best incentive to life. What God has given, and life has justified by its fruits, we might do well to keep and not to call unclean.

The privacy of, and pride in, the things with which men adorn their dwellings; the interest in life because they can do this, and the stimulation that comes from things about that are private and personal, this is the most persistent and the best of human qualities. "I know humble men," says one observer, "to whom it is the romance of their lives that they refuse to sell a warming-pan." A medicine to the mind, an awakener of ambition, beyond almost anything else, is a bit of land which men call their own. "Private ownership of land is one of the greatest incentives to human effort that our world has ever known." It gives a stake in the human enterprise; makes supporters of stability and order, and patriots and defenders of the country under which they live.

Here is a condition of human life and a law of our

life through which men have been urged up. We cannot eliminate this human trait or eliminate the law. We can let men increasingly come under the benefit of the law. The soundest knowledge of human nature today, supported by the most human history, is that this privacy, a place apart, should not be curtailed, but that it should be increased. Because liberty and privacy are so closely dependent on things which men own and control, and because all this is the great stimulator and stabilizer of human effort, the number who have things which they call their own, should be constantly increased, so that all men may have this stimulus. All efforts to give to more men that which comes from this personal relation to property, is moving in the right line, and as the race has moved. It is a step away from the old and first necessity of primitive life: crowd ownership, and crowd use of crowd possessions, where separateness and privacy of life could not be had and where this strongest incentive in man could not begin to function.

We have thought it worth while to lift up here this bit of human history. It does not get us there, but it is a very great help to know where we are trying to go, and where we ought to go. It does not solve our difficulties, but, it does help to know whether our human powers ought to be crucified or cultivated; whether our talents ought to be buried or put out to severer use.



Man and the things of earth which man uses began in the mass. Man has emancipated himself to free, separate, and private life. To do this he had to separate, emancipate and carry with him into that freedom, his little share of the bounties of the earth. The emancipation of the individual freeman, and the emancipation of the things needful to use that freedom, that is the long story up to this time.

In the ordering of men's lives today, and the things of necessity for their lives, there are two ways we might go, with counselors urging us both ways. One urges us back to the yoke of bondage of the mass as in the elder world, both for our lives and for our possessions. The other urges us to hold this emancipation of man and the needful things and to spread more widely to all sorts and conditions of men the fruits of this emancipation.

